

STATE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE

Inter-Department Communication

FROM	Steven M. Couture Rivers Coordinator	DATE	September 22, 2008
SUBJECT	Cocheco River Nomination	AT	Environmental Services Watershed Management Bureau
TO	Thomas S. Burack Commissioner		

Pursuant to RSA 483, I have reviewed the Cocheco River Watershed Coalition's nomination to designate the Cocheco River into the Rivers Management and Protection Program (RMPP). This review was completed in accordance with the criteria outlined in RSA 483:6 for the review of river nominations. Based on my review and on the public comment received regarding the nomination, I am pleased to recommend the Cocheco River for inclusion into the RMPP. My findings are summarized below.

1. Resource Evaluation

The administrative rules for river nominations, promulgated under RSA 483:11, II, establish a point system for assessing the resource values of a nominated river in five different categories. The Cocheco River scored highly in this point system evaluation and was awarded a total of 527 points out of 595 possible points. The points awarded are as follows:

Natural Resource Category

The Cocheco River was awarded 157 points out of a maximum of 205 in this category. There are geologic resources of statewide significance within the river corridor, with large high yield aquifers found in New Durham, Farmington, and Rochester. The Cocheco River corridor is recognized as containing the highest quality habitat in New Hampshire and in a biological region as defined by the New Hampshire Wildlife Action Plan. The river supports endangered and threatened wildlife and plant species of statewide and federal significance including eight plant species and the federally threatened Bald Eagle. Seven exemplary natural ecological communities are located within the river corridor. The New Hampshire Fish and Game Department (NHFG) identifies the river as one of the three most productive herring river systems along the New Hampshire coast, and its tributaries support one of New Hampshire's few remaining populations of wild brown trout. Water quality currently meets Class B standards for aquatic life use for 50% of the Cocheco River's assessment units while 100% of the assessment units support the drinking water designated use. The river is largely free-flowing in its headwater reaches, though beginning in Rochester there are four dams in the 4.9 mile stretch. There are 524 acres of protected open space within the river corridor, including 140 acres of the Strafford County Farm.

Managed Resource Category

The Cocheco River was awarded 90 points out of a maximum of 90 in this category. There are five active impoundments on the Cocheco River which support recreational uses. There are thirteen registered water withdrawals from the Cocheco River and two watershed transfers from the Isinglass and Berry River. Of these, three are for hydropower, and two are for public water supply, and the remaining are for commercial or institutional use. There are three municipal wastewater discharges to the Cocheco River; the municipal discharges are located in Farmington, Rochester and Dover. There are three hydroelectric power production sites on the Cocheco River.

Cultural Resource Category

The Cocheco River was awarded 60 points out of a maximum of 60 in this category. The Cocheco River corridor has an extensive history starting with aboriginal populations, about 3,000 to 5,000 years ago, to European settlement beginning in 1640 with the formation of the village of "Cocheco," now known as Dover. Historical and archaeological resources within the river corridor include six properties that are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The river is also an important community resource and is discussed in each riverfront municipality's master plan. In addition, Dover and Rochester have committees focus on reconnecting their downtown areas to the Cocheco River for economic, recreational and quality of life purposes.

Recreational Resource Category

The Cocheco River was awarded 120 points out of a maximum of 120 in this category. The river provides opportunities for fishing, boating and swimming, and there are additional opportunities for hiking, nature study, picnicking, river access, and multi-use recreational fields in the adjoining river corridor. The Cocheco River affords canoeists and kayakers with a mixture of natural and urban experiences. The N.H. Fish and Game Department stocks the Cocheco River with brook and rainbow trout. Publicly owned recreation areas include the Farmington Town Forest, the Strafford County Farm in Dover, the Cocheco Riverwalk in Dover, Pickering Ponds in Gonic, and the Riverwalk in downtown Rochester. There are approximately twenty recreation areas along the river, and ten are publicly owned and provide access to the river.

Other Resource Category

The Cocheco River was awarded 100 points out of a maximum of 120 in this category. Several viewing points are available along the entire length of the river with multiple wildlife viewing opportunities from walking trails or by boat. The Riverwalk in downtown Dover offers several scenic views of the river and historic buildings. The river corridor moves from largely rural in the headwaters to more residential and developed downstream. There is increasing development throughout the watershed, particularly near existing population centers. All corridor communities have master plans, overlay districts and zoning ordinances that apply to the Cocheco River. Since 1995 a U.S. Geological Survey stream gage has operated in Rochester.

2. Public Comments

The Rivers Coordinator, in coordination with the Rivers Management Advisory Committee (RMAC), held a public hearing in the City of Rochester on July 23, 2008 to provide information about the RMPP and to receive public comment on the nomination. Approximately thirty people attended the hearing. The RMAC heard and responded to a variety of questions about the nomination and the RMPP before taking testimony. All of those who testified spoke in support of the designation of the Cocheco River, with the exception of one request to table the nomination.

To date, the Department has received twenty-six endorsements in support of the nomination (see list - page 4). Six of these endorsements are from local officials in the towns that border the Cocheco River including three from local boards of selectmen and City Council, one from a planning board, and two from conservation commissions. Twenty additional endorsements were received from interested communities, organizations and local citizens. There was one letter of opposition and one letter requesting to table the nomination.

The RMAC was impressed with the level of public support demonstrated for the nomination at the public hearing. During their deliberations on the Cocheco River Nomination, the RMAC members thought the nomination was very detailed and thorough and that public support was appropriate given the multiple uses derived from the Cocheco River.

3. Recommendation

Classification

The RMAC also considered the proposed classification for the Cocheco River during its deliberations on the nomination. The RMAC determined the classifications are appropriate based on the materials presented and the site review.

Based on my review of the resources values associated with the Cocheco River, the level of public support expressed for the nomination, and the deliberations of the RMAC, it is my recommendation that the Cocheco River be designated into the RMPP as follows; this recommendation is consistent with the classification proposed in the nomination for the river and is fully supported by the RMAC:

1. As a natural river from the Cocheco River headwaters at the outlet of March's Pond in New Durham to Spring Street crossing in Farmington (6.39 mile segment);
2. As a community river from Spring Street crossing in Farmington to 0.7 miles south of the Cocheco Road Bridge north of Route 11 in Farmington (3.71 mile segment);
3. As a rural-community river from south of the Cocheco Road Bridge north of Route 11 in Farmington to Little Falls Bridge crossing in Rochester (4.46 mile segment);
4. As a community river from Little Falls Bridge crossing in Rochester to England Road crossing in Rochester (10.45 mile segment);
5. As a rural-community river from England Road crossing in Rochester to Whittier Street crossing in Dover (8.14 mile segment);
6. As a community river from Whittier Street crossing in Dover to head of tide at Central Ave dam in Dover (1.45 mile segment).

Future Management

The Cocheco River's comparatively high scores in all categories are reflective of the balanced character of the Cocheco River corridor. Accordingly, it is my recommendation that the future management of the river seek to recognize its existing managed and recreational resources, while protecting and enhancing its remaining natural, scenic and cultural values.

cc: Katherine W. Peters, Special Assistant for Policy, Governor's Office
Harry Stewart, Director, Water Division, DES (*via electronic mail*)
Paul Currier, Administrator, Watershed Management Bureau, DES (*via electronic mail*)
Steve Couture, Rivers Coordinator, DES (*via electronic mail*)
Lorie Chase, Cocheco River Watershed Coalition (*via electronic mail*)
Cynthia Copeland, Executive Director, Strafford Regional Planning Commission (*via electronic mail*)
RMAC Members (*via electronic mail*)
LRMAC Chairs (*via electronic mail*)

ENDORSEMENTS FOR THE COCHECO RIVER NOMINATION

As of September 22, 2008

Endorsements Received

Organization	Subheading
City of Dover	City Council
City of Dover	Conservation Commission
City of Rochester	City Planner
City of Rochester	Conservation Commission
City of Rochester	Riverwalk Committee
Moose Mountain Regional Greenways	
New Hampshire Estuaries Project	
New Hampshire Fish and Game Department	
Rochester Times	
Strafford County	County Commissioners
Strafford Regional Planning Commission	
Strafford Rivers Conservancy	
Town of Barrington	Barrington Water and Sewer Committee
Town of Middleton	Office of the Selectmen
Town of Milton	Conservation Commission
Town of New Durham	Office of the Selectmen
Town of New Durham	Planning Board
Town of New Market	Town Planner
Town of Strafford	Conservation Commission
Trout Unlimited	Great Bay Chapter
University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension	Strafford County
Waste Management of New Hampshire	Turnkey Recycling and Environmental Enterprises Facility

Other Endorsements

- Four letters from individuals

Letter of Opposition

- City of Rochester, Mayor and City Council (7-5 vote opposing resolution to support nomination)

Request to Table

- Southern New Hampshire Hydropower Development Corporation